

Guide for Assigned Reviewers' Preliminary Comments on Small Research Grant (R03) Applications

The NIH R03 small grant is a mechanism for supporting discrete, well-defined projects that realistically can be completed in two years and that require limited levels of funding. Because the research plan is restricted to 10 pages, an R03 grant application will not have the same level of detail or extensive discussion found in an R01 application. Accordingly, reviewers should evaluate the conceptual framework and general approach to the problem, placing less emphasis on methodological details and certain indicators traditionally used in evaluating the scientific merit of R01 applications including supportive preliminary data. Appropriate justification for the proposed work can be provided through literature citations, data from other sources, or from investigator-generated data. Preliminary data are not required, particularly in applications proposing pilot or feasibility studies.

The types of projects commonly supported by the R03 mechanism include:

- Pilot or feasibility studies
- Secondary analysis of existing data
- Small, self-contained research projects
- Development of research methodology
- Development of new research technology

The NIH Small Research Grant Program (Parent R03) is described in the Program Announcement ([PA-06-180](#)). Thirteen Institutes and Centers (ICs) are participating and will accept applications via this PA: NHGRI, NIA, NIAAA, NIAID, NIBIB, NICHD, NIDA, NIDCR, NIEHS, NIMH, NINDS, NINR, and NLM. Participating ICs also offer other Program Announcements for the small research grant R03 mechanism. NEI and NCMHD do not use the R03 mechanism. The following ICs do not accept R03 applications in response to the parent announcement (PA-06-180), but only in response to their specific R03 program announcements: FIC, NCCAM, NCI, NCRR, NHLBI, NIAMS, NIDCD, NIDDK and NIGMS.

Principal investigators applying for NIH support by submitting a grant application utilizing the R03 mechanism must provide the pertinent program announcement (PA, PAR, PAS) on the Face Page of the application. Without this information, an application may not be assigned to the R03 mechanism upon receipt by the Center for Scientific Review. Investigators submitting applications using the investigator-initiated R03 mechanism program announcement must propose research/work appropriate to the participating Institutes and Centers.

REVIEW GUIDELINES:

Review of R03 mechanisms should be based upon the [standard R01 review criteria](#) (Significance, Approach, Innovation, Investigators, and Environment) and should include an Overall Evaluation. Reviewers should also determine whether the principal investigator has addressed adequately the NIH requirements when Human Subjects and Vertebrate Animals are involved in the proposed research. Some program announcements may have an additional review criterion, such as "Research Capacity Building". As with other mechanisms, after the evaluation of the scientific merit of the application, reviewers should address whether the Budget is reasonable for the work proposed and whether a Model Organism Sharing Plan is required. Also, some

program announcements require plans for Data Sharing (for budgets < \$500,000 direct costs per year).

In addition, evaluation of R03 applications should include consideration of:

SIGNIFICANCE: The IC to which the application is assigned will determine whether the application is responsive to the pertinent program announcement. Reviewers should evaluate the project for timeliness and the significance of the topic/issue being addressed.

APPROACH: R03 applications usually will not have the same level of detail or extensive discussion of experimental methodologies and background information. Appropriate justification for the research may be provided through literature, citations, data from other sources, or investigator-generated data. However, it is important to note that preliminary data typically are not required to justify support for these studies. Indeed, for some program announcements, such as those on secondary data analysis, the generation of new data is not permitted. Therefore, less emphasis should be placed on the traditional indicators that are used in the review of R01 mechanisms. Instead, reviewers should evaluate the conceptual framework and general approach to the problem. If preliminary data are provided, they must be evaluated scientifically.

INVESTIGATOR: Additional weight may be given to the qualifications and track record of the principal investigator. However, R03 program announcements often are designed to support research of scientists in the early stages of establishing independent research careers.

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